Children (1-5 years) - Core Nutrition Knowledge

Nutrition

- A variety of foods should be offered during meal and snack times. Incorporate food from all of the food groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, dairy).
- If offering juice, do not offer more than 4-6 oz. of 100% juice per day. Offer juice in a cup at meal or snack times. Limit the use of sugar sweetened beverages.
- Offer water to drink when thirsty between meals.
- For most children:
 - Whole milk is recommended between 1-2 years of age.
 - Low-fat or skim milk is recommended at 2 years of age and older.
- Young children are at risk for choking. Avoid foods that can be a choking hazard such as, but not limited to hot dogs, popcorn, pretzels, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, whole grapes, round or hard candy, etc. Cut foods appropriately to avoid choking.



Meal and Snack Times

- Offer children 3 meals and 2-3 snacks a day. Children's stomachs are small and they may not be able to eat the same portion sizes as adults. They may need to eat smaller portions more often.
- It is best to offer meals and snacks at regular times during the day. Children often eat better when they are on a consistent schedule.
- Offer snacks at least 2 hours before a meal, so the child is hungry for the meal.
- Provide child-sized forks and spoons during mealtime. Plates with raised edges or deep sections make it easier for children to scoop their food.
- Offer beverages in a cup. Children should be weaned from the bottle around 1 year of age.
- Serve foods family style and allow children to serve themselves. This allows children to take the amount they want and helps them develop their fine motor skills.
- Children should wash their hands in warm, soapy water before eating.
- Children should be supervised by an adult when eating.

Feeding Behavior

- It may take up to 15 tries before a child tastes a new food. Continue to offer the food, but do not force. Offer new foods along with familiar foods. Children may also be more likely to try foods that they have helped prepare.
- Some days children will eat more than others. This is normal.
- Food jags are common where the child will only eat certain foods for a period of time.
- Caregivers should decide what, when, and where to eat. Children should decide how much to eat or whether to eat at all.
- Short order cooking should be avoided. Offer the same foods to the child as the rest of the family, avoiding any choking hazards.
- Do not use food as a punishment or reward. This can lead to undesirable eating habits.
- Try to eat as a family as much as possible. Eating together helps families communicate better with each other. Children who eat family meals often have better quality diets than children who don't and studies show that eating family meals can decrease a child's risk of obesity.



Special Health Care Needs

• Children with special health care needs include physical, developmental and behavioral needs that may impact a child's food intake. Children with special health care needs may not be able to take in enough volume of food or beverages, may not be able to eat certain foods because of the texture, allergies, food intolerances, and/or other medical conditions, and may not know how to communicate when they are hungry or full. Children with special needs must be closely monitored by their healthcare professionals which may include a Registered Dietitian, Speech Language Therapist and an Occupational Therapist to name a few.